



John P. Roche

Now Angela, Speak Up

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NOW THAT a jury of her peers has cleared Angela Davis of criminal charges, the time has come to raise some questions on a different level. Throughout the world, the Communists orchestrated a "Free Angela!" campaign, arguing that she was a "political prisoner." From this we can gather that Miss Davis is a woman of influence, notably in the Soviet Union. Has the time not come for her to exert her moral authority in behalf of the dissident Soviet intellectuals who have been shipped off to labor camps, or, worse, tucked away in mental institutions?

There is reason to be hopeful. On leaving the courthouse, Miss Davis announced that she would devote herself to freeing "every political prisoner in the world." This is a splendid objective, one that I share. However, I have no favorite "political prisoners." As this column has recorded over the years, I have protested the actions of the Republic of South Africa, the Republic of China, the Greek military regime—as well as the clumsy efforts of the United States to invoke the conspiracy statutes against various antiwar militants.

INDEED, much to the annoyance of some California readers who expressed themselves in sulphurous letters, I defended Miss Davis' academic freedom at the time she was under assault by the Regents. It was nothing personal—I have never known Miss Davis—but was simply part and parcel of my convictions about the nature of academic freedom, convictions that led me to defend in similar fashion the rights of a classicist-Bircher at the University of Illinois some years earlier.

The point of this is not to award myself a medal, but rather to indicate that in my judgment I have earned the right to demand a few answers from Angela Davis. And right now I want to hear from her on the subject of Soviet oppression.

Take, for example, the use of mental institutions for penal functions. There is a bizarre logic behind this practice: Given the Marxist-Leninist theoretical background, a man or clinical nut to dissent from woman would have to be a "socialist legality." Communism

was supposed to create a "new man," freed from the environmental corruption of capitalism. In the old days if you asked a dedicated Communist how his society would deal with prostitution, he would reply that under Communism there would be no prostitutes or juvenile delinquency or larceny or any of the other characterological perversions of capitalist society.

BY THIS standard one could easily argue that any "revolutionary" in the United States is obviously deranged. Instead of going into a courtroom protected by the Constitution, Miss Davis could have been brought before a panel of well-chosen psychiatrists, and packed off to an asylum. Such has been the fate of numerous Soviet intellectuals. How does Angela Davis feel about it?

Or take the Soviet Jews, whose crime is that they want to leave Russia for Israel. Probably Angela Davis has seen a good many bumper stickers that growl: "America: Love It or Leave It." How does she feel about the Soviet equivalent: "Russia: Love it or 15 Years Hard Labor"?

As I said, Miss Davis' statement that she wants to free "every political prisoner in the world" is most encouraging. However, before any of us takes it seriously let us await her replies to these specific questions.

Speak up, Angela!

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